

## Editorial 5 - *The Reading Loft* – Bringing Viable Role Models into a Home for Teaching, Learning, and Healing

### *Reading Your Mind*

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With every passing year it becomes more and more obvious that many of today's physical and emotional health problems are the result of an out-of-balance lifestyle. This observation is very evident in individuals manifesting alcohol or drug addiction, eating disorders, emotional compulsions and obsessions, or any of the other extreme behavior patterns.

The process of becoming at risk for future physical and/or emotional hardships is often based on early childhood training and generally increases as viable role models decrease. Since important aspects of people's interactions with the world around them are based on available choices and the ability to make responsible decisions, positive role models become critical.

Imitating the behavior of role models making decisions is one of the primary ways in which individuals learn this process. Poor role models often lead to disfunctional behaviors in those having observed and learned from them. The selection of individuals and situations to be observed is one of the primary self control mechanisms available to a child as they enter into adolescence with its greater range of freedoms. The persons young people choose to model and imitate have great influence on future behavior patterns.

The available models to children and youth may be far ranging, however, important life skills may only be learned from a few.

Since many children are more involved with their peer group than their own families, it may be helpful to evaluate what the modeling influences are. A

method for doing this is to have youth keep track of the visitors they have in their life for one week. The evaluation form may be used for this. It is suggested that in the 'other' category role models from literature be included. The literature models can include those found in comic books, short stories, novels, scriptures, journals etc. Perhaps all family members could keep such a record for a week and then talk about their findings as a family.

It has been well documented that the greatest predictor of teenage substance abuse is through observing their friends' habits. Self control includes the ability to determine who influences us by choosing the people we decide to be around. The extent to which these individuals influence us is determined by some of the following:

1. The status of their role model, their sex, and age. Role models more similar to ourselves, have more status, and are imitated the most.
2. The degree of imitation decreases as the model becomes a less-realistic person.
3. Simple actions are imitated more frequently than complex ones. Aggressive behaviors are imitated very readily.
4. We adopt self-praise and moral patterns similar to those of the models we imitate.
5. Rewarded behaviors of the model are more likely to be imitated than the punished ones.
6. High motivation to imitate increases the likelihood of

imitation. Behavior observed in the past but not imitated immediately leads to an increase in imitation of that behavior if the behavior is rewarded. Thus even though bad behaviors are not displayed by us, we have them imprinted on our minds if we have been exposed to them.

These research findings suggest that it is not just the availability of models but distinct characteristics that increases or decreases the likelihood of imitation. The process of being read to has many advantages over other forms of media presentations. Television and movie models are difficult to process by the viewer because of the rapid rate of presentation and changing images. Models in literature have the advantage of the reader forming his own images and thus making the presentation realistic. Both youth and adults have commented how their visualization of stories like *The Hobbit* or *Lord of the Rings* are much more interesting than any animation or movie production. The movement of the storyline is much more under control of the reader with more time for reflection. These and other considerations support the power of the written word.

Viable live models are the best for teaching children. In their absence or as an adjunct careful consideration and presentation of literature models to children will enhance the probability of successful growth and the ability to have a wide range of coping and decision making options. The choice is up to responsible parents and educators or it is turned over to the media and other cultural influences.

# Visitors—Self-evaluation Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

This form will help you evaluate the role models you have the most contact with during a 24-hour period. From start to finish you should self-evaluate at the end of each hour. Score a 1 for that hour if you have had contact with any people on your list. Score 2 if you have had more than 10 minutes of contact, and a 3 if contact was for the entire hour. Total your results.

	A.M.												P.M.												
Contacts	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total					
Parents																									
Siblings																									
Relatives																									
Teachers																									
Friends																									
Neighbors																									
Television																									
Radio																									
Tapes																									
Videos																									
Sports																									
Books																									
Others																									

